DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 968 CS 210 000

AUTHOR McClain, Anita
TITLE I Can Teach, They Can Write! Student Teachers and Primary Children Pattern Books as Models for Creative Writing.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northwest Regional Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English (Portland, OR, April 27-29, 1986).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Literature; Comparative Analysis; Creative Activities; Creative Teaching; *Creative Thinking; *Creative Writing; Critical Thinking; Elementary Education; Methods; *Models; *Prewriting; Primary Education; Reading Aloud to Others; Story Grammar; *Student Teachers; *Teaching Methods; Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

To encourage children's creative writing in a classroom setting, student teachers used two types of children's books as models: (1) a traditionally structured picture book in which the story maintains strong development of plot, setting, and characters as in "Peter Rabbit"; and (2) a predictable pattern book that develops a repetitive pattern as in "In a Dark Dark Wood." In both cases, the teacher read the book aloud, discussed the book with the class, and drew a chart on the board illustrating the story grammar. The undergraduates who taught both lessons self-evaluated the pattern book lesson as being more positive and effective than the lesson using a traditionally structured book. The student teachers' preference for the pattern book was the result of positive reactions from the children in terms of creativity and independence in easily writing their own pattern stories. The pattern stories written by the primary children reflected more creative and critical thinking in terms of story development than the stories they wrote in a traditional format. (Examples of the children's stories are appended.) (SRT)

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I CAN TEACH, THEY CAN WRITE!

Student Teachers and Primary Children Pattern Books As Models for Creative Writing

In an undergraduate language arts class students were required to teach a creative writing lesson using a traditionally structured book as a model and a second lesson using a pattern book as a model. The traditionally structured book was defined as a picture book in which the story maintains strong development of plot, setting and characters such as Peter Rabbit (Potter, 1971). The pattern book was defined as a predictable book which develops a repetitive pattern such as In A Dark Dark Wood (Melser and Cowley, 1980).

Of the several effective generalizations related to excellent writing (pre-writing activities, self-editing, peer editing, avid reading of books), teachers of creative writing realize the importance of pre-writing activities with primary children. The use of good book models for pre-writing activities causes students to realize that "other authors' writings can be used as resources for their own compositions" (Rhodes, 1981).

The question, what type of book might be most effective as a resource for primary authors, is legitimate and important. What type of book will motivate and elicit the most effective creative writing in children, in both quantity and quality? What type of book sets up the most effective teaching lesson and allows the teacher to be successful? The undergraduates who taught both lessons self-evaluated the pattern book lesson as being much more positive and more effective as compared to the lesson using a traditionally structured book. One student remarked:

> Comparing the two lessons, I thought the pattern book lesson went much better than the traditional book lesson. When using the pattern book as a story starter, the students didn't have trouble getting started as they did with the traditional book. Overall, I thought the lesson (pattern book) went well - if I were to do it again, I wouldn't change a thing.

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Another student commented:

> I liked this creative writing assignment (pattern books) much better. It was more successful. The kids were having more fun; they were obviously more focussed; knew where they were going.

A third student commented:

> Overall, between the two books, I feel the kids liked and responded better to the pattern book.

The following lesson plan was used by those students using a traditional book as a model:

Objective

Children will enjoy Peter Rabbit (Potter, 1972).

Children will use Peter Rabbit as a model to develop their own stories.

Anticipatory Set

1. Materials:

   Have a stuffed Peter Rabbit "talk" to the class - use it as a puppet.

2. Basic Impromptu:

   "Today I'm going to take you on an adventure. Listen carefully to hear what terrible things happen to me in Mr. McGregor's garden!"

Purpose

Today after you listen carefully to the story, Peter Rabbit, I'm going to ask you to write a story about another "stuffed" animal.

Listen for how the story begins, what happens, and how it ends. Listen for how Peter Rabbit is described. Your story will need a beginning, a middle, and an end, and things and places will need to be described.

Input

1. Read story.
2. Discuss and chart on the board (setting|character|plot|resolution).
3. Model a story as a group. Have a second stuffed toy for "model story". Name animal, decide on a problem, how to solve the problem, describe

Input (continued)

the character and setting (chart). Write three short paragraphs based on the chart.

The following stories were developed by primary children who participated in the traditional story lesson plan:

Stripy

Once upon a time there was a bee named Stripy. He lived in a hive with his mom. Stripy wanted to go outside when his mom wasn't looking, he flew out a hole in the hive. Stripy was thirsty. He saw a bowl of water. When he dived in to take a drink, he couldn't get out. He yelled and yelled. His mom heard him and saved him and Stripy never went out of the hive again. - The End

Untitled

Once upon a time there was a squirrel family and a chipmunk family. And the squirrel family lived on a farm and they didn't like each other and one day the chipmunk family went for a walk and one of the chipmunks named Twitch went in the gate of the squirrel family saw him. But one of the chipmunk family saw what was happening and he said, "Don't, don't hurt him, don't!" "I wasn't," said the squirrel, "I was going to ask if he wanted a cookie and milk." So the chipmunk family all ate cookies and milk and were friends.

Another student designed a similar lesson plan for the traditional story model, Clifford's Tricks (Bridwell, 1974).

My Cat

Hi! My name is Heather, I have a cat named Jone Jet. She can do many tricks. My favorite trick is when my cat does a back flip. She does back flips when she is running. She is very fun to watch. I hope that she learns to do many more tricks. - The End

Notice that several of the primary children's stories come to a conclusion, "The End". They used mundane endings rather than creative endings. This type of ending calls for fewer thinking skills as opposed to the endings used by children who wrote pattern stories.

In comparison, the following pattern book lesson plan was taught to primary children:

Objectives

Children will enjoy In A Dark Dark Wood.

Children will use In A Dark Dark Wood as a model to develop their own stories.

Anticipatory Set

Who likes surprises? Tell me about some of your surprises.

Purpose

I want you to listen to a book which has a surprise ending. After you've heard the story, I want you to write a similar one using one of your surprises or dictate it for me to write.

Input

1. Read story.
2. Discuss story using chart (theme|repeated words|places|surprise).
3. Discuss their ideas and chart.

Check for Understanding

Write a story of your own or dictate one for me to write while you work on the pictures.

Text for In A Dark Dark Wood (Melser and Crowley, 1980):

In a dark dark wood,
there was a dark dark path.
And up that dark dark path,
there was a dark dark house.
And in that dark dark house,
there was a dark dark stair.
And up that dark dark stair,
there was a dark dark room.

Text for In A Dark Dark Wood (Continued)

And in that dark dark room,
there was a dark dark cupboard.
And in that dark dark cupboard,
there was a dark dark box.
And in that dark dark box,
there was a GHOST!

The following stories were written by primary children who participated in the pattern book lesson:

Untitled (Figure 1)
Once there was a hot hot desert and in that hot hot desert, there was hot hot sand and in that hot hot there was a hot hot rock and in that hot hot rock there was a Dinosaur!

The Weird, Weird Boy
Once there was a weird, weird boy named Herb. He had a weird, weird mom and a weird, weird dad. To top it off a weird, weird brother and sister. Everyone and everything was weird, weird. One day Herb went to the cellar and opened up a big chest and there was a weird, weird goblin.

Untitled (Figure 2)
Once there was dark old house. I went into the dark old house. I went up the stairs. There was a curtain. I opened the curtain. There was a magic passage. And there was light room. I went into the room. There was light box. I opened the box and out came a puppy.

Untitled (Figure 3)
ONCE, in a big, big city there was a big, big garden. In the big, big garden stood a big, big house. In the big, big house was a big, big room. In the big, big room was a big, big shelf. On the big, big shelf was a big, big chest. in the big, big chest WAS A...
....tiny kitten.

Notice that the students in Figures 1, 2, and 3 purposely planned their stories to build to large or small print or turned to a new page and in small print wrote a surprise ending. This reflects much creative thought and planning for a primary aged child. The pattern stories, in general, indicate that the children used many thinking skills to develop such creative pieces of writing, especially in the story endings. Langer and Applebee (1985, p. 36) reinforce this idea when they state, "good writing and careful thinking go hand-in-hand".

The college students found the pattern book lesson, In A Dark Dark Wood (Melser and Cowley, 1980), so successful that they found other pattern books to develop more creative writing lessons. One student selected Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day (Viorst, 1976). Another student selected Wake Up Farm (Tresselt, 1955). The following stories written by primary children exemplify their motivation and eagerness to write:

Ryan's No Good, Very Bad Day

When I got up I had gum in my hair. Then I knew that it would be a no good, very bad day. When I got to school, my teacher was sick and my sub was the meanest teacher in the whole school. Then I knew it would be a no good, very bad day. When I got home, my mom did not have goodies for me. She told me she would have them, but she didn't. Then I knew it would be a no good, very bad day! -by Ryan

Untitled

My name is beanbag. The farmer feeds me oatmeal and orange juice. After breakfast I brush my teeth with "gwobzle" toothpaste. Then I fly around by myself when it is sunny. I like playing gobbleball and basegobble. My hobbie is standing on my head and throwing eggs, but I eat them sometimes for lunch. Then I play a little more and then I eat my dinner.

The student who presented the creative writing lesson using Wake Up Farm (Tresselt, 1955) as the model pattern book commented:

> The kids had a great time reading the book and they got a kick out of the repeated words in the pattern book. They had no trouble deciding what animal to select for their character. I feel the pattern book lesson was more successful than the traditional book lesson.

In summary, the college students preferred the use of pattern books as models and resources for creative writing as opposed to traditionally structured books. Their preferences resulted from positive reactions from the children in terms of creativity and independence to be able to write pattern stories easily. Also, they felt the pattern book lessons were overall more successful and were easier to teach. Many of them commented that even the slowest of students were able to participate more easily and wrote more when a pattern book was used. Lastly, the pattern stories written by primary children reflected more creative and critical thinking in terms of story development than their stories written in a traditional format.

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Figure 1.

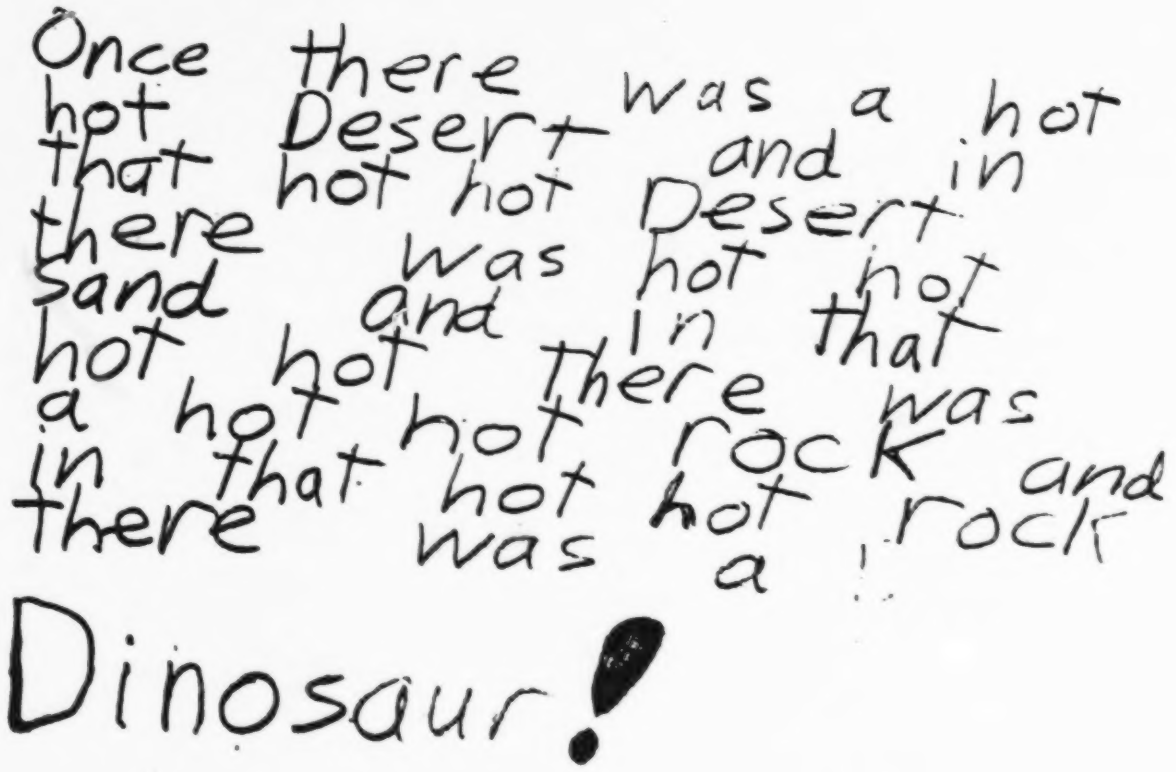

Once there was a hot
hot Desert and in
that hot hot Desert
there was hot hot
sand and in that
hot hot there was
a hot hot rock and
in that hot hot rock
there was a
Dinosaur!

Figure 2.

Once there was dark old house. I went into the dark old house I went up the stairs. There was a curtain. I opened the curtain. There was a magic passage. And there was light room. I went into the room. There was light box. I opene the box and out came a

Figure 2 (continued)

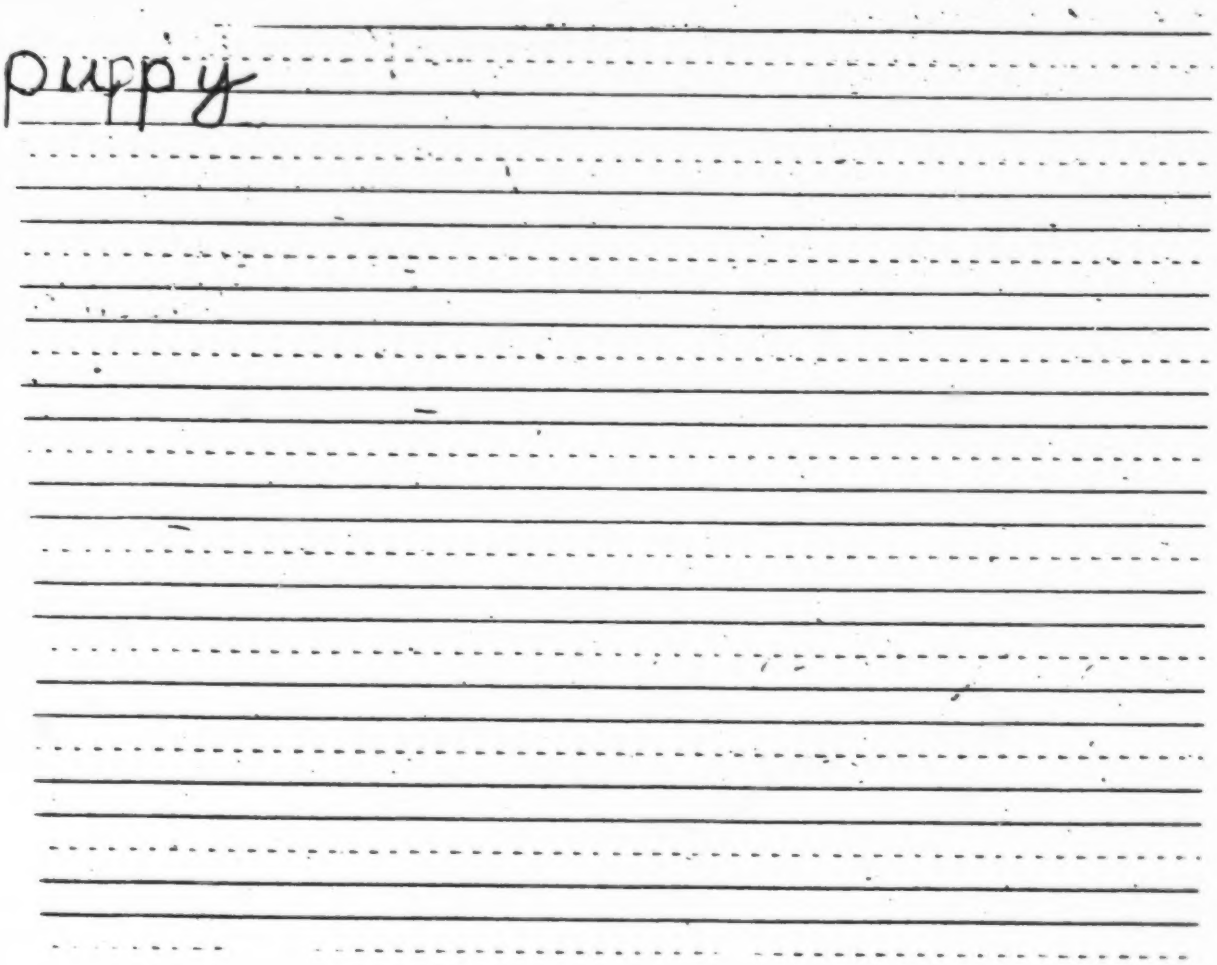
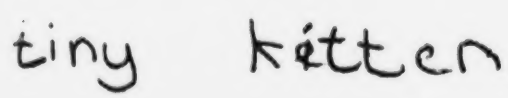


Figure 3.

Once
In a big, big city there
was a big, big garden
in the big, big garden
stood a big, big
house in the big,
big house was a big,
big room in the
big, big room was a
big big shelf on the
big, big shelf was a
big, big chest in the
big, big chest
WAS

Figure 3 (continued)



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